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UNCLAS RECIFE 000078

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON AMCIT MISSIONARY SHOT IN NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL

REF: RECIFE 0000074

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

1. (SBU) Summary. John David Leonard, an American citizen missionary shot in Brazil, has been medevaced back home to a hospital in Des Moines, IA, where he remains under medical care.

Embassy LegAtt and A/LegAtt traveled to the area where Mr. Leonard was attacked, and report that investigation into the incident continues, although the assailants have not yet been identified. Contrary to some published speculation, there appears to be no political motive behind the attack, nor are there any connections to the recent murder of American nun Dorothy Stang. Rather, the most likely motive appears to be either Mr. Leonard's personal business practices as a landlord or his involvement in ministry in an area known for alcohol and drug abuse. End Summary.

2. (U) American missionary John David Leonard returned to his home in Des Moines, IA via a privately arranged medevac. All aspects of the medevac were managed by the American mission group supporting his work and its insurance carrier. Mr. Leonard arrived in the US on Saturday, July 9, and remains in Iowa Methodist Medical Center. Neither Mr. Leonard's family nor his missionary organization requested assistance from Consulate Recife in arranging his medevac.

3. (SBU) Embassy LegAtt and A/LegAtt visited Maceio shortly after the shooting to express USG interest in the case and determine the status of the Brazilian investigation. Both reported that they had been given ample access to the principals and the freedom to interview relevant witnesses and other American missionaries themselves. Based on their investigations, LegAtt's impression is that this assassination attempt was not/not politically motivated against Mr. Leonard as an American citizen, missionary or person involved in sensitive political or non-governmental organization (NGO) issues. Rather, LegAtt thinks that the murder attempt may well have links to Mr. Leonard's unusual private business practices in Maceio as a landlord renting homes to persons with very modest income or his vocal stance in anti-drug efforts. According to LegAtt, other American missionaries described Mr. Leonard as charismatic and dynamic pastor, but weren't surprised by the assassination attempt.

4. (U) According to his family, Mr. Leonard had only recently returned to Brazil from a professional sabbatical to care for a son recovering from an accident and receiving medical care in Maceio. Mr. Leonard had been managing personal business affairs and arranging for his son's return to the US. Beverly Leonard, John's wife, stated that they originally tried to have their son medevaced on the same flight as his father, but instead decided to have him return to Iowa as originally scheduled in approximately two weeks.

SWAVELY